

in news

Flood project in Southeast Missouri would save lives and property

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Your Nov. 21 editorial, "Let it flood," missed the mark about the proposed St. John's-New Madrid flood protection project in Missouri's Bootheel. You suggest that "keeping local feet dry" is not worth the supposed ecological cost of the project.

First, "keeping local feet dry" is a quaint way of describing the benefits of flood control. I've visited this part of the Bootheel numerous times. It contains small towns, schools, vital infrastructure and wildlife.

I've witnessed the Mississippi River at floodstage, and it does a lot more than dampen the feet of local residents. The frequent flooding kills people and animals and keeps the area poor by stifling economic opportunity.

In short, the project would mean safety and jobs for thousands of people in New Madrid, Scott and Mississippi counties. Considering that this is one of Missouri's poorest regions, that is a real benefit for real people.

Second, there is no ecological cost to the project. The only concern is an alleged loss of wetlands, and one of the conditions of the project is that more than 8,000 acres of cleared agricultural land be returned to bottomland hardwoods and wetlands, which the public will be able to enjoy for generations to come.

Your editorial ignored the years of work and study undertaken by the levee district, the Corps of Engineers and other agencies, all designed to ensure that the project benefits the environment.

This is a situation where leaders should be working together to help people instead of fighting. There are enough real environmental problems in Missouri - for example, water quality in the Lake Taneycomo and Table Rock systems in southwest Missouri - without spending time holding up a project that would benefit people economically and environmentally as well.

Sen. Jim Talent *Washington, D.C.*

The Nov. 21 editorial said, in effect, that the people of the Boot-heel were not worth saving. The editorial praised the roadblocks that have been put in front of the St. John's Basin-New Madrid Floodway Project, ostensibly to protect the ecosystem. The editorial refuses to acknowledge that lives are at stake in floods.

Scott County has significant flood hazards extending along the St. John's Ditch from mid-county through the Sikeston area into New Madrid County. Residents of MiniFarms, Sikeston, Miner and the adjacent areas of the county are at risk when the causeway floods. And the St. John's ditch on our end can't be efficient until the problems on its New Madrid County end are addressed.

We are working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the city of Sikeston to clean out the St. John's to provide some local relief before the next big flood. This is only a Band-Aid, however, and the larger project must be addressed by our state and federal governments.

Our federal and state legislators and the Corps of Engineers have worked for decades to develop the right solution. We do not agree with those state and federal natural resource agencies that

oppose the project on tenuous grounds.

And we'd like to invite the editors of the *Post-Dispatch* to visit us during the next spate of rain and flood waters. Bring your boats, boots and lifejackets.

Martin Priggel Presiding Commissioner **Walter Bizzell**, First District **Jamie Burger**, Second District Scott County Commission *Benton, Mo.*